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ABSTRACT

This paper chronicles the experiences of nine adolescent girls who participated in a 3-year science, mathematics, and technology program for Appalachian girls. The girls lived in two West Virginia communities (one rural, one urban). Most of the girls were poor; six were African American. Descriptions of the girls' neighborhoods and local communities show how these contexts provided serious obstacles and challenges to the girls' aspirations and at the same time were sources of powerful support and encouragement. All of the girls aspired to higher education and professional careers and aimed to realize those goals by deferring marriage and family commitments. Turning directly to issues of gender identity and voice, girls' perceptions of gender bias in school and community are examined, along with the extent to which the bias informed their developing sense of themselves. Both Black and White girls often spoke about their personal identities with confidence and did not hesitate to express frustration and indignation about gender unfairness in their families and schools. In contrast, some African American girls were unwilling to acknowledge or confront racial injustices. This inconsistency is discussed in terms of schools' intolerance of confrontation and adults' advice to pursue strategies of "resistance for survival" over "resistance for liberation." Programs targeting underserved populations must anticipate how they will address justice issues, which inevitably will arise. (Contains 34 references.) (SV)

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We Roll Deep: Appalachian Girls Fight For Their Lives

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Abstract

We Roll Deep: Community and Resistance in the Lives of Appalachian Girls

> Remember how I was saying we all hang together? We roll deep, for real . . . Everywhere we go, we're rolling deep. It's a bunch of people with us. Like when we're going to go meet guys, it be a BUNCH of girls! When you mess with one, you mess with all of us . . . That's how tight we is. We've been tight since we was little . . . And all of us is kin in some ways . . . And if we're not kin, we're real close . . . We treat each other like sisters basically. (Charlotte)[1]

Charlotte, a 14-year-old African American girl lives in an urban area in West Virginia. She lives in a public housing facility with a reputation for drugs and violence. While her dream is to be a medical doctor, she and her girlfriends face major obstacles in realizing their aspirations. Like other girls, Charlotte is constructing her life in the context of family, school, and community experiences shaped by ethnicity, social class, place, and gender. Drawing primarily on observation and interview data, our paper chronicles the experiences of Charlotte and eight other adolescent girls who participated in *Voices*,[2] a three-year science, mathematics, and technology program for girls, their parents, and communities. The program targeted two Appalachian communities. One rural—Mountain, the other urban—Metropolis. By featuring the voices of nine adolescent, Appalachian girls, most of whom are poor— and in the case of six of the girls—African American, we contribute to the small but growing body of literature on non-privileged girls and girls of color, and the roles of resistance and community in the process of their identity construction.

Female interviewers talked with each girl at the beginning of the first and second years of

the project, and *Voices* staff members tape-recorded meetings in which they discussed the girls' involvement in project activities. Before the project's third and final year, *Voices* staff purposefully sampled (Patton, 1987) eight focus girls—four rural and four urban; five African American and three European American—whose stories might prove particularly illuminating in understanding the girls' experiences. At this time a researcher free from program delivery responsibilities began to serve as a participant observer in *Voices* and school activities and to conduct a series of semi-structured individual interviews with the eight focus girls. In addition, the researcher interviewed girls' parents, school personnel, and others familiar with *Voices*, including girls who had left the program. It is the voices of these girls—eight focus girls and one girl who left the program early—which are featured in this paper. The table below provides girls' names, ethnicities, and residences.

Featured girls	**Ethnicity**	**Residence**
Brandy	African American	Mountain
Charlotte	African American	Metropolis
Ebony	African American	Metropolis
Elisha	African American	Metropolis
Keesha	African American	Metropolis
Leeann	European American	Mountain
Nellie	European American	Mountain
Tasha	African American	Mountain
Tina	European American	Metropolis

First we introduce the girls' neighborhoods and local communities, to show how these contexts provide the girls with serious obstacles and challenges and at the same time are the sources of powerful support and encouragement. Next we describe the future plans of the girls, all of whom aspire to higher education and professional careers and aim to realize those goals by deferring marriage and family commitments. We then turn directly to issues of gender identity

and voice, examining the girls' perceptions of gender bias and the extent to which it informs their developing sense of themselves. Finally, we explore the issue of resistance. Strong community identification and relationships, especially in the rural area, may provide a foundation for explicit education for "resistance for liberation" (Robinson & Ward, 1991). Such resistance may have the potential to strengthen the girls individually as well the ethnic and regional communities of which they are a part.

"There's Not Much Jobs Here"

The girls live in two communities in Appalachia, an area often depicted as an idealization of close families, crafts, and connections with nature, on the one hand (e.g., Klein, 1995) or offered as an exemplar of deficiencies such as traditionalism and fatalism in explaining Appalachian poverty (e.g., see Weller's 1965 description of "Yesterday's People" or O'Brien's 1993 description of Appalachian Head Start teachers trying to "remedy 'deficient' home environments"). Whereas both approaches may be well-intentioned, we argue that social inequities are strengthened by virtue of their ahistorical, psychological nature. Like Seitz (1995) and others (see, for example, Gaventa, 1982), we draw instead on social-structural models stressing "the political and economic position of Appalachian communities within an historical moment," as we explicitly highlight the circumstances of girls and women. Following what Banks, Billings, and Tice (1993) call "postmodern directions in Appalachian Studies" (p. 293), we do not intend to offer a definitive understanding of adolescent Appalachian females. Rather, we hope to write about the girls in a way that acknowledges their individuality *as well as* their membership in regional and cultural communities.

The girls we studied live in West Virginia, which has the "lowest income in the nation—

fifty percent of all households have incomes of less than $21,301" (Ewen, 1996, p.14). Four of the focus girls live in an isolated rural area—"Mountain County"—and four live in the medium-sized city of "Metropolis." Whereas both the urban and rural areas share features resulting from poverty and isolation, they differ in both the pervasiveness of poverty and isolation and the nature and strength of community ties.

Mountain County, born during the Civil War, peaked economically during the coal-fired manufacturing frenzy of the World War II period. This relatively short-lived period was followed by many years of economic decline as the mines, owned by out of state (and in some cases, out of country) companies, increased their production and profits by replacing human with machine labor. The natural riches of the area were extracted by landowners who contributed little to the development of the area. People we met in Mountain County were very clear about the colonial nature of the region's relationship with "King Coal." A school official describes the system that took but didn't give back:

> I . . . graduated from high school in 1959 so I grew up . . . when coal was king and coal was booming. Now, unfortunately, what happened was the coal was taken out and nothing was put back. For instance, there's not a single mile of . . . four-lane highway in this county; infrastructure is nonexistent. We're making great strides along those lines with the water and the sewage and we're hoping the roads will eventually come, but until such time that they do, then industry isn't coming here; [it] isn't going to happen. So, our girls are going to have to know there's something outside this county for them to go to.

Losing friends and neighbors is a common experience in Mountain County. Adults vividly and wistfully recall better times—times when the county seat was "jammed with wall-to-

wall people" and it was hard to find a parking spot. Children talk of friends who moved away, often to North Carolina, as their parents tried to find employment in jobs not available in rural areas like Mountain. As one parent put it, "As the mines mechanized and there wasn't anything to come in to offer employment, you know, I watched so many of my friends move away."

The exodus has devastated the county wide school district. In the mid-50's, it enrolled 25,000 students; today it has fewer than 6,000 students, and continues to decline. Schools have been forced to consolidate and teaching staffs have been reduced. Mountain County girls attend two middle schools that are housed in very old, partially empty school buildings. While one school is characterized by more social stratification than the other, both schools serve an overwhelmingly low-income population with between 76 and 90% of the students qualifying for free and reduced meals.

Although Metropolis is only a three-hour drive from Mountain, it is the government, retail, and industrial center of the state. It seems to be thriving in comparison to Mountain. For many Metropolis residents, however, this is not the case. As in Mountain County, there has been a decrease in population (an 11% decline between 1980 and 1997) and, as of 1995, 21% of the county's children were living in poverty (West Virginia Kids Count Fund, 1997). Metropolis teachers and parents also talked with us about young people leaving the area to find employment.

> I guess they're saying we don't have anything to offer, being here as young kids. And we don't, you know. We don't have much going on. But . . . will they come back? No. No, if they're successful, they will leave. They will leave. (Metropolis teacher)

The urban girls live in two adjacent working class neighborhoods with a mix of single family homes and public housing facilities. One of these two neighborhoods includes the city's largest

housing facility with a reputation for drugs and violence. The girls attend a junior high school characterized by an "atmosphere of distrust" and a "culture of control" (Carter, Keyes, Kusimo, & Penn, 1996).

Many responded to West Virginia's declining economy by leaving the state, but others have stayed to fight for higher wages, safer jobs, and a better quality of life. Resistence to political and economic circumstances have spawned major social reform efforts. For example, efforts to enact federal legislation related to occupational safety originated in West Virginia with the Black Lung Movement (Ewen, 1999).

The economically depressed circumstances in both the inner city neighborhoods of Metropolis and the rural communities of Mountain affect men and women alike. However, the economic circumstances in the two communities we studied are arguably worse for girls and women than for boys and men. One father addressed this in expressing concerns about his own children: "I've got four daughters. And the women have even less opportunities than the men do." According to a *Voices* mentor in Mountain, the only female professions the girls are able to see in their communities are "teachers and just a few nurses." Along the same lines, a Mountain *Voices* coordinator commented, "I think it's something about growing up in this area and seeing that most people that do things are males. The only place you find an abundance of females [is] in the teaching profession and nursing around here, and secretarial."

This is not surprising in light of the dual job structure that persists in the United States generally (Spring, 1998) as well as in Appalachia. Maggard (1990) describes labor markets in Appalachia as extremely sex segregated, with most women in lower-paid, lower-status positions in personal services, health services, retail sails, tourism, and light manufacturing. Also, in

working class families, women are typically in economically dependent positions. According to Maggard, "labor market status and dependent household status mean that Appalachian women are particularly vulnerable to entering poverty, remaining poor, or slipping in and out of poverty" (p. 5).

Recent discussions of poverty tend to ignore rural, largely white poverty in areas like West Virginia. These discussions target minority urban youths—especially gangs—while more dispersed, widespread rural poverty in West Virginia is ignored. Jesse Jackson recently depicted the area as a part of America that has been "left behind" (1998). Jackson reminded his audiences that "most black people are not poor," and that "most poor people are white, female, and young." This description fits the *Voices* girls' communities.

"It's Sort of Like a Family"/"It's Drugs and Violence in my Neighborhood"

These quotes from the girls reflect the complex nature of the experiences in their communities. A strong sense of place, expressed as intense feelings of connection to homes, families, and friends, is juxtaposed with a knowledge of the drugs and violence disturbingly near.

The girls and their families experience a strong sense of kinship and community in both the urban and rural areas we studied. It is common for several generations of Mountain families to have lived in the same area, sometimes in the exact same house or neighborhood. While less common, extended families also exist in Metropolis. Connections among family members, and among neighbors, are strong and enduring, often providing families with a source of friendship and pleasure as well as protection from harm. Tina's family, for example, has lived in the same Metropolis neighborhood for almost 23 years and Tina's mother appreciates the security this provides for her daughter because "all of the neighbors know her . . . . See, they watch her

because they know who she belongs to . . . . And her grandmother just lives down the street from us and . . . she's just like a second mom to me and she takes care of Tina."

At the same time, the girls speak openly about the realities they face; in both communities, both black and white girls and their parents have concerns about the girls' physical safety. Tina was harassed by a "stalker" in her Metropolis neighborhood when she was in the seventh grade.

> There was a stalker after me. I'd go home after band class and I'd have to walk home down W Street. And this man, he'd come up to you and ask if you had a boyfriend or something. And he'd follow you around. . . [Mom] called the police and he said, "We can't do nothing unless he does something to her." And she said, "Well, then it would be too late!" I was kind of scared to walk home . . . . So I started walking home with my friend . . . . I wouldn't go by myself. If I had to go by myself I'd go to a pay phone, I'd call my dad and wait for him to get up to the hill and then I'd walk home . . . I had to change routes three different times.

Although Keesha has not been directly threatened, she was frightened by an almost-fatal assault on a friend.

> Around the corner I have seen people who sell drugs, and around the corner I have to listen to gun shots . . . One day I was doing my homework and one of my friends got shot in the corner. And they said that he was up there driving and couldn't make it to the hospital . . . they caught up with him and they shot him again. Happily, he stayed alive for that one. It's because he was selling drugs and he went to the wrong person.

Alcohol and drugs figure prominently in discussions about local community problems in both the urban and rural settings. In Metropolis, Tina's mother doesn't let her stay at home alone because of "a drunk that lives beside of me. . . . He's tried to get in the house two or three times . . . . And then we've had some dope people across the street. And I'd rather be safe than sorry." Charlotte has had first-hand experiences with people using "crack, marijuana, and heroin" in her public housing facility.

> I know lots. . . . I've done caught people doing it. I catch people around bushes. I see them. Now that they locked the back hallways you can't walk in on them no more, and they can't go in there . . . . You can see them walking around looking for somebody to buy from . . . . And sometimes it's not even people who live there. They'll come up in there, giving drug dealers their cars for some crack in return.

Drugs and violence are also features of Mountain County girls' lives. Leeann describes "drug dealers that sell drugs every day and . . . park in front of our house . . . . One time this guy he come up to my house and asked if we want some Xanax and stuff:" and Tasha describes the remote area where she lives this way: "It's drugs and violence in my neighborhood really . . . . I live real close to . . . where all the drugs be . . . and the police be down there most of the time." Interestingly, while drugs and violence seem to be less pervasive in Mountain County than in Metropolis, it is Tasha, a Mountain County girl who most strongly emphasizes her parents' desires to protect her from harmful influences of the community.

> My dad or mom . . . keep me in the house so I won't get involved with stuff of the world like drugs and drinking and all this. And partying. They won't let me go to parties and stuff. So I just stay in the house and if I want to go out somewhere, they like take us to

the mall or the movies. So I don't go outside and hang with the other people.

As is true in Metropolis, the negative realities Mountain County girls experience are mediated by a strong sense of belonging in the community. One father called it a "cultural characteristic" that "when you're from here, no matter where you go, something always draws you back home." He attributed this partially to the small size of rural communities where "you know everybody and everybody knows you." Unlike in Metropolis, descriptions of communities in Mountain County went beyond family and neighbors to include teachers. Even a teacher who lives in a neighboring county is well acquainted with most in the small area where she teaches: "I worked in the elementary school for like six years. And a lot of the kids that are here [in middle school] now, either I knew them in elementary school or I knew their brothers and sisters in elementary school, so I'm pretty familiar with the parents of most of them." Many teachers have more than a passing knowledge of the children and their families, and in some cases have developed relationships with them that extend beyond the school. These kinds of extensive, deep community connections are carried down from previous generations as this Mountain County math and science teacher explains.

> When I first started school we had community schools . . . . You had multiple grades in one room. And the teacher lived in the area so she knew you and your background. She knew how you were at home. She knew how you were at school. There was no separation . . . . And for myself, I have found it helps when I know the kids, when I get to know their backgrounds and about their life. And it does seem to help when they know that I am originally from this area . . . . It's sort of like a family. You're part of the family.

These community bonds provide a safety net for adolescent girls in Mountain County where like many other parents, they have concerns about their daughters' sexual vulnerability. This is not unique t this community, especially when girls develop relatively early. Pipher (1994) reported that "32% of all rapes occur when the victim is between the ages of eleven and seventeen . . . . At the same time, boys and men continue to be socialized in a way that "legitimizes male aggression," (Eder, 1995, p. 154). Taken together, these factors increase the possibility that adolescent girls, whether poor or not, will be placed at sexual risk by males. Brandy is a case in point. To protect her from dangerous situations, Brandy's parents place strict limitations on her social interactions. The following comments, made by her stepmother, reveal her concerns about Brandy's vulnerability.

> [Brandy's friends] always say that she's locked down, she don't go no place . . . . She could say, "Well mom, I'm going to so and so" . . . or "I'm going outside." We don't allow that . . . . She'll say, "I just want to walk down to [nearby neighborhood] and back." Sometimes you walk down to [nearby neighborhood] and you see a lot of boys hanging on the corner. What they're doing, I don't know, but it don't look right what they're doing. And I also try to stress to Brandy, even though she's 13, her body is not like a 13 year old, you know? And I don't want men out there to misjudge that.

Clearly, the concerns and efforts of parents, as well as teachers and others in the community, provide a web of support for these girls as they construct their identities in the context of day-to-day circumstances that are sometimes difficult. Perhaps this explains, at least in part, why the girls we came to know have such high aspirations.

College and Career: "I Already Got That Painted Out"

Like the "at risk" girls featured in Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan (1995) and the resilient girls Le-Page-Lees (1997) described, the Appalachian girls we studied aspire to college degrees and professional careers. Charlotte, the African American teenager living in a public housing facility in Metropolis, has been firm in her resolve to become a medical doctor. Her seventh grade list of three careers of interest included, "A doctor, a doctor, and another doctor." While she has vacillated about which kind of doctor she wants to be, she never wavered in her desire to become a physician.

> I'll be in like college, getting my medical degree. Pediatrician. I don't really know. I went from an obstetrician to a pediatrician. So I don't know . . . a surgeon . . . . I always say a doctor. I been wanting to be a doctor since I was very little . . . . [At] 18 I'm going to be in college, [with] my car and my own house. I already got that painted out.

Charlotte is aware that certain things could prevent her from realizing her dream, but she is determined not to let those things get in her way. " I've been asked to sell drugs twice before. I said no. I'm just not into that. I want to go to school. I want to go to college. I want to finish. I don't want to be dead for trying to sell something fake!"

Similarly, Tasha, an African American girl in Mountian, has her mind made up to go to college, become a doctor or a lawyer, and live in a "mansion . . . with everything you need, like big rooms, big TVs." She has even selected a prestigious university to attend.

> I'd like to be a psychiatrist, a corporate lawyer or a doctor . . . [15 years from now] hopefully I'll be in college law school . . . . in Washington, DC, at Georgetown University. And I'm going to be majoring in law. . . . And I'm going to be a good

student. Very alert.

For her part, Leeann, who also considered going into medicine and law, has settled on plans to attend a nearby state college in order to become a math teacher. As the next to youngest child in a family of ten (none of whom has attended college), Leeann is ambivalent about leaving home long enough to attend college. "I want to go to college, [but] I don't want to leave my mom and my dad. I don't want to leave."

These Appalachian girls picture their future lives in terms of college, high status positions in professional careers, and comfortable lifestyles. Nellie, who hopes to pursue zoology, archeology (in Australia or Egypt), or perhaps biochemistry as a line of work, describes the "ideal woman" as someone with "a really good job. She's like a head of a bunch of guys. That's what I always think of . . . . And the guys have to look up to her and everything." Although Nellie's ideal woman also has a husband and a child, the career is the most important factor: "It's important to have a good job. If you have a good job, everything else comes when it comes." Along the same lines, Brandy's strong desires to "be successful in life" seem to hinge on her occupational position.

> I want to be all I can be. I want to have a good job so I can hire me a housekeeper . . . . I always wanted to be something important like a doctor or a lawyer. Now I want to be a business person. . . . I want to be a manager . . . like stand up there and give reports, presentation . . . and things like that. Or be the president . . . because I like to write and I like to be the boss. I like to have my way of things.

All of the eight focus girls hope to attend college. Only three are considering traditional "female" careers such as teacher, actress, and beautician. In addition to careers such as lawyer,

doctor, scientist, and teacher, the girls are contemplating careers as veterinarians, athletes, paramedics, and welders. But how will the girls realize their dreams given the constraints of their circumstances? The "American Dream" of intergenerational upward mobility, "always less tenable for the poor than for the middle class, has become even less so in recent years" (McLoyd & Jozefowicz, 1996, p. 356). Like the Hispanic adolescent girls De Leon (1996) described, these Appalachian girls are highly optimistic about their futures despite major barriers in their social environments. As we have seen, many live in closely knit communities with strong bonds to people and place, but in low-income communities, one of which seems to deteriorate with each passing year. In turn, poverty has had a direct impact on the nature of schooling for these girls.

Most Mountain schools are dilapidated buildings housing declining numbers of students, teachers, and administrative staff. Math and science instruction in the schools these girls attend has suffered as a result (Parrott, Kusimo, Carter, & Keyes, 1998). Nellie's dad is aware of this problem and expresses concerns about Nellie's academic achievement. "I'm not sure that we're doing a real good job preparing our kids for college. So I think that's the biggest obstacle . . . . [Nellie] hasn't gotten the background in math . . . and as a result of that she's going to have difficulty." Whereas these girls aspire to high level positions, in many cases careers requiring strong backgrounds in math and science, it is not evident that their elementary and middle school experiences are preparing them adequately for high school coursework, much less college and graduate school.

Metropolis schools are better equipped and staffed than those in Mountain. Schools the girls attended benefit from being in a large, reasonably well-funded district. Still, many of the girls have limited access to challenging curriculum and instruction. For example, one of the girls

elementary school principals refused to recommend any students to take the test required to qualify for algebra in middle school, claiming that her students didn't need to take algebra until high school. The middle school principal and many teachers made it clear that they did not expect kids coming from the neighborhoods of the *Voices* girls to excel. In fact, when the *Voices* program moved to the middle school with the girls, the principal told its staff that the program was for "the wrong girls," and would only frustrate them by expecting achievement beyond their abilities. The bureaucratic structure of the large middle school alienated parents. One *Voices* girl's mother attempted to schedule time to talk with the mathematics teacher about her daughter's dropping grades, but was told all the conference "slots" were filled. When she came to the school anyway, hoping that time would be made for her, she was turned away. At the same time, teachers often explained students' lack of achievement as due to their parents' indifference to their children's welfare.

In addition to barriers of inadequate educational opportunities, diminishing job markets (Mountain), and low expectations (Mountain and Metropolis), the girls were also confronted with obstacles specifically related to gender.

Gender Relations: "I Don't Want No Kids at a Young Age"

Like the white working class girls Weis (1990) described; the "at risk" girls Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan (1995) studied; and the African American and Puerto Rican girls profiled in Weiler (1998), the Appalachian girls we studied favor paid labor over domestic roles, understanding that pregnancy, husbands, and family life could prevent them from realizing goals. If an ideal woman is one who has a good job and a nice house, she's also one who does not have children at a young age. In fact, Tasha believes it best to avoid marriage and children altogether.

> Well I think an ideal woman is if you have your life together. You have a job. You don't have a man to mess you up and you don't have any kids . . . It's like you have a good paying job, you're successful, and you don't let anything get in your way. . . to make you stumble. And that's the way I hope I'll be when I get older.

Others take a less extreme position; they would like to have a family at some point in their lives, but later is definitely better than sooner. When asked what, if anything, could get in the way of them going to college, the most frequent response was early pregnancy.

Often, non-privileged girls take on family responsibilities at young ages. Many of the women Le-Page-Lees (1997) studied described their childhood years in terms of growing up fast. They cared for younger siblings and held jobs outside the home as teenagers. McLaren (1998) also described the necessity for girls with younger siblings to assume parental roles, especially when parents held jobs that did not provide enough income to pay for child care.

Some of the Appalachian adolescents faced similar circumstances. Beginning when Keesha was only ten years old, she had major responsibility for a younger sister. This experience clearly influenced her views about family life. While she clearly loved her younger sister and relished her role as a care giver, she does not want that role to dominate her teen life.

> I don't want to be a teen mom. I don't want to . . . ruin my life . . . because I'd have to sit home and babysit and go to work and change diapers and feed 'em and stuff, and it seemed like I was a teen mom for a long time because my mom had to work and my dad was always out and I had a little sister to take care of. So I was doing mostly the main stuff. And I'm doing it right now because I take my little sister out, make sure she eats, gets new clothes, make sure her hair's combed, she has somebody to play with.

Leeann received strong messages about the dangers of early pregnancy from her mother and sisters. Leeann's mom, who had eight children herself, advised Leeann to make other choices: "If you quit school at 16 . . . chances are all you'll do is get married and raise kids . . . . And that's not a life." Leeann's older sister, who followed her mother's pattern of early pregnancy, gives similar advice to her younger sister.

> I mean, having kids is fine, but you need to make something of yourself. I mean, don't just go straight to having babies . . . . I quit school when I was 16, got married when I was 18, had my first baby when I was 19. And it was no fun. I mean, I love my kids, love them to death. But if I could do it all over again, I believe I'd have stayed in school. That way I would have something for them when I did have them. Because when you quit school, you really don't have nothing for them. Because you don't have the money.

Similarly, a Mountain County school administrator who also serves as a *Voices* mentor laments the fact that sometimes girls

> get the idea that the only thing that they are supposed to do is grow up and get married and have children, and I don't mean to put that down. I certainly think that's a valuable experience. But I think they need to know there are lots of opportunities out there for them and they can do and be whatever they want to be.

"We're Still Fighting For Our Rights"

The Mountain County and Metropolis girls we studied, both black and white, view gender equality as an unrealized goal. Their parents and teachers tend to agree.

Men still control most of everything. Women are making headway with it, but it still, it's

lacking. We're not considered equal of men. And I think in a job, even now when it comes to if you have two candidates who are equally qualified, if one's a male and one's a female, they're going to take the male . . . and I think it's the same all over the United States. (Mountain County math teacher)

Keesha's mother agrees, speaking forcefully about the lack of progress toward gender equality.

> Women are no better [off] than they were when my mom was a girl . . . as far as being dominated. As far as sexual harassment on the job. As far as the pay. I say we're still fighting for our rights for that. We're still fighting for our rights to be equal beside a man, not behind him.

A *Voices* mentor describes personal experiences with gender-based career obstacles. She vividly recalls being a young girl with her heart set on becoming a doctor.

> I wanted to be a doctor. Every time I had to take a shot, I'd beg for the needles . . . . I'd go home and I'd get ink . . . the kind you could draw up and give those dolls shots. They were full of ink. I wanted to be a doctor. [But] my uncle said I was too short; I couldn't reach a patient. So I settled for pharmacy . . . I was a girl. No one told me any different. It was a man telling me that; why shouldn't I believe him? . . . . I was wanting to be a doctor and was just talked out of it.

The girls, too, are aware of male privilege, seeing boys and men in powerful positions in their families and schools. Whereas the adult women are more focused on economic opportunities now and for the future, the girls emphasize differences in how boys and girls are treated in their day-to-day activities at home and school, where they see boys getting more attention, having greater freedom, and getting into more trouble. In Tasha's words, "girls get discouraged by boys

because boys get more than girls do and they get more opportunities than girls do."

In 1994, Sadker and Sadker reported that boys receive substantially greater teacher attention in school classrooms, regardless of age or race of the students or sex of the teacher. According to the girls and teachers in Mountain and Metropolis, boys still dominate classroom interactions. Leeann believes boys may understand the assignments better and, consequently, "they don't give the girls a chance to even raise their hand to answer a question. They just blurt it out." Along the same lines, Nellie explains that "guys . . . in class they're always answering a lot more than girls. And they don't have anything to worry about."

Like the teacher who made gender relations explicit in her "gender-fair classroom" (Orenstein, 1994), some Mountain County and Metropolis teachers attempt to encourage greater participation among the girls. A Mountain County math/science teacher, for example, sometimes gets "the idea that [a girl is] trying to formulate an answer . . . and I try to give them the time they need to formulate that answer. Like I may have some guy pop in and say, 'I know. I know.' And, [I'll say,] 'Well, she does, too. Leave her alone.' You know, and [the girls] do come up with it." Along the same lines, a Metropolis science teacher believes that "girls don't get enough attention in classes anyway" and "they're behind in math and science." Consequently, she makes a conscious effort to call on the girls in class. "I recognize my girls . . . because who volunteers most in my classroom? My boys—because they want my attention. They're more aggressive. And the girls stay laid back."

Girls are frustrated in other circumstances where boys control the action and girls remain on the sidelines. Leeann describes how this happens in physical education classes and in the school cafeteria where the power corresponding with higher age/grade level intersects with the

power of being male.

> Like in gym, we play football all the time and they won't pass the girls the ball. We play basketball and they won't pass us the ball. And like we're in the lunch line, and they would pass you and stuff. The eight grade gets to pass the seventh grade and the eight grade boys pass the eight grade girls.

The girls are particularly sensitive to gender differences in sports-related opportunities. Again and again, they express frustrated desires to participate in athletic activities. Nellie, wearing a sweatshirt with the words "There's no competition—girls kick butt," explains that some people are "saying that football is a boy's thing. I wanted to go out for football this year . . . and my mom told me not to. She's afraid I'll get my head knocked off or something. But I really wanted to, though." And there's Keesha, imagining what her future might be like if she were a boy. "I'd probably be a coach . . . for the Dallas Cowboys or something . . . because my favorite football team is the Cowboys. I love 'em. And I'll just be sitting there wishing like 'Hmm, I wish I could do that."

In ironic contrast to the girls' perspective, at least one teacher attributes the girls' lack of participation in sports to the passage of Title IX. In this school, Title IX has been interpreted[3] to mean that girls and boys must take all classes together.

> At one time before this Title IX . . . you had completely separate girls' phys ed classes and boys' phys ed classes. And the girls that were by themselves would participate. When you put them in with the boys they don't want the boys seeing them at their worst, or what they consider their worst, so they don't participate . . . . Girls who are kind of athletic and you can see them out participating with another group of girls—[but] if you

put them in a gym class with guys, they'll just sit in the bleachers.

Such a perspective blames and stereotypes the girls, rather than focusing on barriers to their participation in some sports.

While some of the girls' parents, especially mothers, are outspoken advocates of gender equality, many girls feel they are treated less respectfully and given less freedom than boys in their families. For example, although Leeann states unequivocally that "boys and girls are equal and they all can do the same as anybody else," she is clear that her brother leads a very different life than she. Even though he is older, she perceives an accruement of advantages specifically related to his maleness.

> [Dad] lets my brother get away with everything just because he's a boy and that's why . . . I can't go out past nine o'clock. My brother can come in at 1:00 and he wouldn't get in trouble . . . . It's all because he's a boy . . . . I won't be allowed to do nothing [even at 16]. I'm already not allowed to do nothing . . . . My daddy thinks you can't do nothing unless you're a boy. Like walk down the road, up the street. I'm not allowed to go up past the clinic where I live, and it's like right beside my house. And my brother—he can go anywhere. I don't think it's fair.

Along the same lines, Tasha explains that her parents usually let her older brother "go anywhere he wants . . . they won't let me go anyplace." Asked if that might be because she is younger than her brother, she responds, "Well, it has to do with that, AND that I'm a girl. And they don't usually trust girls, my parents don't." As discussed above, this may be related to parents' concerns about their daughters' sexuality. Ebony explains that girls have fewer opportunities than boys, specifying that boys "get to stay out later . . . and girls don't get to do nothing." She

reflects on possible reasons for this situation—at least in her own family: "Tell you the truth, I think my mom thinks I'm going to go outside and get pregnant or something.

The "Lost Boys"

Although the girls we studied resent and perhaps envy boys' greater freedom to come and go from home as they please, and their more frequent opportunities to play sports and to speak out in some classrooms, they are not favorably impressed with the boys' propensity for getting into trouble. This ranges from relatively minor trouble at school for "act[ing] like children . . . throw[ing] paper everywhere and talk[ing] too much" to serious trouble with the law.

> I don't think I would WANT to be a boy at school . . . because it would be hard to get along with these boys these days. Because you don't want to be doing certain stuff they be doing, because I know a certain group that if I was a boy, I would like to hang out with and that would be Lost Boys. But they do everything . . . like drugs . . . so I don't think I would want to. (Tasha)

Similarly, when speculating about how her life might be different if she were a boy, Charlotte, of Metropolis, remarks that she would "probably be selling drugs . . . . I'd probably be in jail, too, for selling drugs . . . because almost all the boys in the [housing project] . . . they're either selling fake crack or they're selling the real thing." Keesha takes it even further, saying that if she were a boy, she "would be killed probably, because I would be the type that would probably go out and sell drugs or . . . I'll probably get shot for being a smart aleck." While the girls themselves don't articulate this view, what they perceive as parental overprotection, may benefit them in terms of averting danger and trouble. If this is true, it could

be argued that similar limitations and protection would benefit adolescent boys as well.

Identity and Voice: "I'm Me and I Don't Try to be Nobody Else"

Adolescence is a transition from childhood to adulthood, during which young people form attitudes, adopt behaviors, and make choices that will shape their lives. For girls, adolescence is a time when their previous, confident identities are jeopardized by their growing awareness of the devaluation of females in their culture. Non-privileged girls, such as those who are non-white, poor, and/or rural, experience adolescence in the context of "family and a community that is most often negatively impacted . . . by racial, gender, and economic oppression" (Robinson & Ward, 1991, p. 88). Interventions like the *Voices* project, designed partially in response to such work, aim to empower non-privileged girls to maintain strong, confident identities—and voices—as they move through the difficult middle school years. Brandy's mother endorses such efforts wholeheartedly.

> You have to learn to speak up for yourself . . . and tell people what you like and what you don't like. And if you're that type of person that's shy and holding everything in, you can't be heard. So the [*Voices*] program teaches them to open up . . . their minds and their voices to protect themselves mostly. And to speak on what they want.

Over the three years of the study, we did hear girls speak strongly. They had a sense of who they are and where they want to go, confidently asserting intentions to be true to themselves regardless of pressures to do otherwise. For example, Tasha, who describes herself as smart, friendly, and "a lot of fun to be around," is resolved to stay on course in her life even if it means being different from "other girls."

> I have a good head on my shoulders. I don't let anything get in my way from me succeeding. And I have a good heart . . . What I'm most proud of? . . . my grades . . . and I'm proud of how I'm carrying myself as a young lady. Because I'm not letting things get in my way like other girls do.

Similarly, Nellie seems to feel comfortable, even proud, as she describes herself in terms of divergences from traditional notions of femininity.

> I have my own way of doing stuff. I sometimes can be different from other people . . . I'm just not like other people. See, a lot of people call me a nerd and everything because I like math and science, but I just ignore 'em because it's nothing I can do about it . . . . It doesn't bother me. I consider that as a compliment actually.

Nellie's dad, acknowledging that his daughter can be "stubborn," complains about getting "locked into power struggles with her" at home. However, he clearly values the strength of her spirit and sees it as a valuable asset for her in the future.

> As she grows older . . . when she gets deeply convicted about something, she'll stick to her guns regardless of what the consequences are.v And I think that's probably a good trait in the long run. I don't want to break her spirit . . . . She's a unique kid . . . . She marches to a different drummer; let's put it that way . . . . She doesn't mind being different.

Brandy's stepmother worries about her daughter wanting to be involved in more activities outside the home, but Brandy seems to know who she is.

> I'm a nice person, easy to get along with . . . I'm loud . . . nice, sensitive. . . I'm generous to little children . . . I like to write, and I like to be the boss. I like to have my way of

> things . . . . I'm a little bit honest . . . . I have respect for others, especially adults . . . . [I'm most proud] that I'm me and I don't try to be nobody else. And I don't care what people think about me. . . I'm striving,and . . . I'm trying not to worry about nobody else, what they do.

Elisha is "kind of shy" but more talkative now than in elementary school. She speaks directly to the issue of voice as she describes herself over the past two years.

> I was quiet. I'm louder now . . . Sometimes I talk soft. Sometimes people can't hear me . . . [In 5th grade] . . . I wouldn't talk to anybody . . . I talked to my friends and that's all. Now I mostly talk with everybody. Some people think I'm too quiet to voice an opinion . . . but most of the time I do say what I have to . . . When you're quiet you don't really get your point across as much as you need to.

Elisha looks forward to going to high school, atttending parties, and eventually going to college where she is considering preparation to become a pediatrician. She is strongly committed to her goals and determined not to let anything interfere: "I'll keep myself out of trouble. I will not let people put pressure on me."

These girls' frank, determined, positive self-descriptions are heartening. In some ways they are similar to the working class girls described by Brown (1996), who "do not share middle class girls'. . . conventional definitions of feminity. Instead they have minds of their own" (p.1690). On the other hand, the confident assertions of identity and independence may be evidence that they have internalized the "steady stream of common socializing messages encouraging autonomy and independence" to which American teens are subjected (Robinson & Ward, 1991).

The girls are growing up in some of the poorest neighborhoods in the poorest state in the United States; they have few material resources on which to draw as they negotiate their day-to-day lives. In addition to poverty, the girls face obstacles related to gender, occupying less powerful positions than males in their families and schools. For the six AfricanAmerican girls, their race is the basis for even more obstacles, especially in communities where they are a very small minority.[4] Yet, there is reason for optimism. The girls have deep roots in close-knit communities where friends, families, teachers, and others serve as sources of emotional, personal, and intellectual strength and guidance. Moreover, the girls speak in strong, confident voices about their current identities as well as their aspirations for professional careers and comfortable lives in the future. As a way of further exploring the relationship between these disparate forces, we turn, in the final section of the paper, to the issue of resistance.

Resistance: "I Just Keep My Mouth Shut"

The Mountain County and Metropolis girls we studied, both black and white, often speak about their personal identities with certainty and confidence, and they do not hesitate to express indignation and frustration about what they perceive as gender unfairness in their families and schools. At the same time, some of the African American focus girls seem hesitant or unwilling to acknowledge or confront personal and collective injustices pertaining to race. This inconsistency may come from contradictory messages the girls receive. They are encouraged to be their own person and speak their own mind, yet are also advised to be polite and stay out of trouble. Brandy's stepmother, for example, vigorously advocates the importance of speaking one's mind, but cautions that it must be done politely.

Speak and be heard . . . . Don't expect people to read your mind . . . . Open up. Don't be

> afraid to ask questions . . . . If there's something I don't like, I speak about it. If it's something that I like, you know, I'll speak about it . . . . I've always been that way and sometimes it got me in trouble . . . . So as I got older I [knew] WHEN to say things and when NOT to say things. I learned how to . . . say it in a respectable way . . . You don't have to say it nasty. You can say it in a polite way and still get your point across.

However, it is not always clear how both to know and speak one's mind and be polite and respectful. For example, Keesha may have received mixed messages about voice and resistance while working on a service learning project on racism. She was encouraged by *Voices* staff to investigate possible racism in her Metropolis school by developing and administering a survey, but her *Voices* mentor discouraged her from using the survey as a vehicle for addressing racism among teachers, perhaps the issue of greatest concern to Keesha and other students. Keesha provided the following explanation for the elimination of certain survey questions.

> Some of them were like about the teachers and stuff. And Miss N, our mentor, thought we shouldn't put it on there because it might make the teachers mad and stuff like that. *What did you want to ask that she was afraid might make them mad?* Like, "Do you think some of the teachers at [this school] are like prejudiced? Do you think some of them accuse you of stuff . . . because of [your] race or your color?" Stuff like that.

Also, Keesha recalls feeling confused about how to respond to racism in elementary school. A white classmate had scoffed, "Niggers can't read" when an African American student had trouble reading orally. This struck Keesha as a painful injustice, but her mother suggested a response to the event that limited resistance.

> That really did hurt my feelings, and when I came home and told my mom and my mom

> was like, "Did he especially say *you*?" And I was like, "No." [Then she said,] "Then don't worry about it." At first it didn't [make sense] but now I look at it and I say, "Yeah". . . . My mom is [saying] . . . it's going to be a point in time when you hear that word and somebody may call you that, because I think it happens to everybody . . . But if he was talking to ME, then I really would get angry.

Keesha's mother encouraged her to interpret this event in terms of personal injuries rather than race relations. If an individual is personally attacked, it is reasonable to respond with indignation; if there is an attack on one's race, gender, class, etc., that is not to be seen as a personal affront worthy of the risks inherent in confrontation.

Even in situations where some girls experienced personal discrimination, they were encouraged to tolerate it quietly. Although Tasha and another African American girl in Mountain County believe a European American girl treated them rudely because of their race, an African American school counselor encourages them not to take action of any sort.

> She [white girl] got to get smart with us. And she acts like she's racist. And she don't say that to like white people. She only says it to black people. Like when we had that [*Voices*] trip, and [me and Tara] asked to go to the bathroom when we was on the bus, and it pulled over, and . . . [the white girl said something] about us peeing on ourselves. And we got upset but we didn't say nothing to her because [the black school counselor] told us to ignore her. So.

The counselor's advice is similar to Fordham's (1993) description of high-achieving black females whose academic success "cost [them] a sense of voice." The girls Fordham studied "ignored their detractors, remaining silent when they were expected to . . . take some action [in

response to] violation of their person or space" (p. 21, 22).

At least partially as a result of such guidance, some of the African American focus girls behaved in ways that avoided confrontation, especially toward those in powerful positions. Rather than risk trouble, they tended to walk away from and ignore experiences that make them angry. Some of the European American focus girls reacted to slights and offenses with seemingly passive acceptance. Tina, for example, describes how she responded to kids making fun of people: "It's best to just keep your mouth shut . . . I just keep my mouth shut and don't say a word about it . . . I sit there and count to five."

The girls' passive responses may be related to their belief that getting angry and fighting are inappropriate behaviors. For example, Leeann describes her "bad attitude" in terms of her inability to keep angry feelings under control. "I have a bad attitude sometimes. I have a really bad temper. . . I can't control my anger and stuff . . . If I'm mad sometimes I just punch the wall and stuff." Charlotte, on the other hand, who is known for her "bad attitude," stands out among the girls we studied in that she is not one to avoid a confrontation or a fight, even with adults in authority, especially when she believes she is being treated disrespectfully or unfairly. Talking about the principal at her school in Metropolis, Charlotte says,

> He just thinks he can get smart with any and everybody. But I've never came into a confrontation with him. But if I did and he like got smart with me, I think I'd probably get smart with him back. I don't like people to get smart with me. If I don't disrespect you, you don't disrespect me. That's how I see It . . . . Basically, I'm independent. If somebody asks me something, I'm going to tell you how I feel. I don't care who you is.

As a result of such defiant assertions, the school counselor has Charlotte pegged as a

troublemaker who only "wants to be seen and heard." As was the case with the "troublemakers" Cohen and Blanc (1996) studied, Charlotte's verbal and physical aggressiveness are seen by significant adults as as challenges to their authority and status rather than as potential for strength and leadership.

Fordham (1993) describes "parenting, teaching, and child-rearing practices that reward ... silence and obedience with good grades." Likewise, Howley, Parrott, and Kusimo (Unpublished manuscript) found that Metropolis teachers use grades to reward compliant student behavior. Resistance, especially among "loud black girls" (Fordham, 1993) like Charlotte, was punished in a variety of ways, including low grades. For example, Charlotte, who resists "active participation in [her] own exclusion" (Pagano, 1990) by loudly demanding fair and respectful treatment for herself and others in her group, consistently received lower grades than her standardized test scores would suggest.

With the obstacles already facing these girls, they are advised by parents to avoid saying or doing anything that would hurt their chances of success. They were advised to stay in school and make good grades, steer clear of drugs and alcohol, avoid sexually activity, believe in themselves and speak their minds—as long as they spoke in ways that avoided trouble. Supportive parents and other adults offering such advice are well-intentioned advocates, assuming it to be the route to life success. However, these messages may correspond with what Robinson and Ward (1991) call "resistance for survival" rather than "resistance for liberation."

Community and Resistance

Over the life of the *Voices* program the power of community to either support or erode the girls' aspirations became increasingly clear. Students belong to overlapping communities of

family, church, neighborhood, peer group, and school. In each, for better or worse, they have a place. In Mountain most teachers knew the girls' families, which meant they also knew their status in the community and the academic performance of their older siblings—and sometimes their parents. Families knew their place in the community's social structure and initially were accustomed to keeping in it. However, over the life of the program, teachers and peers began to see many of the *Voices* girls as more able than they had previously believed. More of them were invited to participate in academic competitions, assist with technology, and answer questions in class. Because they were *Voices* girls, they were expected to achieve. At the same time, the girls helped one another with homework and held one another accountable for achieving. Family members also began to see themselves as more capable not only to oversee their daughter's education, but to achieve themselves. For example, a *Voices* parent now manages all technology in her office, a responsibility she says she would never have sought had it not been for *Voices*. Gradually, community networks shifted to reframe *Voices* girls as better than many of them had once been seen.[5]

Yet, the boundaries of ethnicity, socio-economic status and gender that helped define the girls have not vanished. Now the girls are in high school. Whether their self-confidence remains strong enough and their aspirations real enough that they are able to recognize and resist actions that diminish them remains to be seen. And even if they persist in efforts to gain the best education available, the best education available in science and mathematics is still inadequate. Schools in rural communities with declining economies and populations frequently educate their students in ill-supplied, ill-equipped, and poorly maintained buildings with many teachers teaching out of their field. As one Mountain teacher said, "An 'A' here isn't the same as an 'A'

in other places."

In Metropolis, barriers to achievement are less obvious than poor course availability, insufficient resources, and inadequate teacher preparation. Yet they are as difficult to overcome. The existence of well-equipped, challenging classes led by well-prepared teachers are of little benefit to students who are excluded from them by virtue of their socio-economic status. When behavior that is not middle class is taken as evidence of poor academic potential, and when elementary schools in low-income neighborhoods do not prepare their students for rigorous middle school courses, the resulting lack of access has the same affect as a lack of the courses themselves.

Parents are well aware of the value placed on "appropriate" behavior when they stress the importance of being polite and not causing trouble. Schools that tolerate students who are loudly defiant are rare, if they exist at all. It is not surprising that adults advise strategies of "resistance for survival" over strategies of "resistance for liberation" when the latter take the form of confrontation that results in severe consequences for students. Yet ignoring incidents of injustice, or trivializing them as personal rudeness, can also cause damage. Helping children avoid either battering themselves against injustice or becoming numbed to it is a difficult task. A task that was not included in the *Voices* program design. Voices, focusing on science, mathematics, and technology learning addressed issues on a case-by-case basis, rather than pragmatically. Yet the task is a critical one for young women who aspire to become successful doers of science and mathematics. We conclude that programs targeting underserved populations need in their design to anticipate how they will address justice issues, for they will inevitably arise. To the degree that injustices impacted the lives of the *Voices* girls, they diminished the

girls ability to benefit from the program. Initial plans to help the girls surface and name the injustices they experienced might have increased their resilience. Naming injustice can drain it of some of its power to harm. Devising and discussing responses to it can build group support and develop each girl's ability to walk a path between being battered by or becoming numbed to injustice. Girls who prepare for and enter fields with heavy use of science and mathematics are likely to find themselves in environments that were in the recent past hostile to women and minorities and are still often unwelcoming. To succeed in these fields, science and mathematics knowledge alone is insufficient. Girls will also need the know how to recognize barriers facing them because of their gender, ethnicity, or cultural background. They will also need to be strong enough and wise enough to shatter them.

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Endnotes

1. All names of persons, communities, and schools are pseudonyms.

2. *Rural and Urban Images: Voices of Girls in Science, Mathematics, and Technology (Voices)* was a three-year project funded by the National Science Foundation. The program, beginning in the fall of 1995 with sixth grade girls, was designed to follow the same girls throughout their seventh and eighth grade years. Two counties in West Virginia, one urban and the other remote and rural, hosted the project. In the first year, project participants met once a month for workshops in their respective counties. In years two and three, in addition to the workshops, the girls worked with mentors who had careers in science, mathematics, or technology. During the third and final year of the project, girls met regularly with school sponsors and were involved in designing and implementing community service learning projects.

3. This is actually a misinterpretation of Title IX of the 1972 Higher Education Act. Title IX provides for sex equality in employment in educational institutions and for sex equality in educational programs. The original legislation applied to all educational institutions from preschool through graduate school, including public as well as private facilities. The 1983 *Grove City College v Bell* U.S. Supreme Court decision restricted Title IX to specific educational programs within institutions. However, the 1987 Civil Rights Restoration Act overturned the court's decision and amended Title IX to include all activities of an educational institution

receiving federal aid. (Spring, 1998)

4. African Americans comprise a small percentage of West Virginia's total population (approximately 3 percent); so sites were carefully selected to ensure that *Voices* would have a critical mass of African American girls in each site.

5. Almost a year after the program's end, a teacher who had been a *Voices* coordinator remarked about how difficult it was to get parents to school. We expressed surprise based on the *Voices* experience. Her reply was that these kids/families were worse than the *Voices* girls and families. Yet the *Voices* girls had been randomly chosen for participation and included families that once would have been among those about whom she was complaining.